

# Quarterly NEWS-LETTER

## OF THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA

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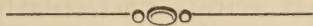
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### "FIFTY COPIES OR LESS"

SINCE 1914, the Club has issued 49 publications. Of these, 23 are now in stock—the largest number that has been available to members at any time since the Club was founded. This unusual number of titles on hand is due to the fact that during the past five years the publications have sold much less rapidly than in earlier and more prosperous times. In consequence, present-day members may obtain copies of many Club books that under ordinary conditions would long since have been sold out.

It should be emphasized, however, that this situation is a temporary one. Although publication sales were

abnormally slow during the 1930-1935 period, at no time, even during the depth of the depression, did they stop entirely. During the first part of 1936 the number of book orders received has shown a steady increase. As a result, the reserve supply of a rather large group of the publications has been all but exhausted. The most recent inventory, taken in April, revealed that 11 of the 24 titles then in print numbered less than 50 copies each—in many instances a great deal less. Since then, one of the 11—Stoddard's "Diary of a Visit to Molokai" (Grabhorn Press, 1933)—has been sold out and several others are nearly gone. In all probability, at least a third of the titles now available will be out of print before the end of the year.

The Club lists here the ten publications of which less than 50 copies remain. This will undoubtedly be the last time a number of these titles will be listed, and the last opportunity members will have to acquire them. It is felt that many—particularly those who have joined within the past two or three years—will wish to take advantage of this final chance to secure one or more of these desirable items. A card is enclosed for convenience in ordering. The list follows:

THE VISION OF MIRZAH by Joseph Addison. Portrait by Dan Sweeney. 300 copies printed by John Henry Nash, 1917. \$2.00.

ODES AND SONNETS by Clark Ashton Smith, with an introduction by George Sterling. Decorations by Florence Lundborg. 300 copies printed by Taylor & Taylor, 1918. \$3.00.

THE KASIDAH by Sir Richard F. Burton, with an introduction by Aurelia Henry Reinhardt. Decorations by Dan Sweeney. 500 copies printed by John Henry Nash, 1919. \$8.00.

THREE TALES by Ambrose Bierce. Decorations by Ray F. Coyle. 400 copies printed by John Henry Nash, 1920. \$3.00.



A GRACIOUS VISITATION by Emma Frances Dawson, with an appreciation by Ambrose Bierce. 300 copies printed by The Grabhorn Press, 1921. \$4.00.

PRAYER: A POEM by Charles Kellogg Field, with a foreword by David Starr Jordan. 330 copies printed by The Grabhorn Press, 1921. \$1.50.

OSCAR WEIL: LETTERS AND PAPERS, with an introduction by Flora Arnstein, Albert I. Elkus and Stewart W. Young. Decorations by H. Von Schmidt. 400 copies printed by The Grabhorn Press, 1923. \$10.00.

PHILOBIBLON OF RICHARD DE BURY. Decorations by Donald McKay. 250 copies printed by The Grabhorn Press, 1925. \$10.00.

THE GENTLE CYNIC. Translated by Morris Jastrow, with decorations by Valenti Angelo. 250 copies printed by The Grabhorn Press, 1927. \$10.00.

MR. STRAHAN'S DINNER PARTY by A. Edward Newton, with an introduction by Edward F. O'Day. 330 copies printed by John Henry Nash, 1931. \$15.00.



## THE CALIFORNIA LITERARY PAMPHLETS

DURING the present month, members will receive Number Three of the Club's 1936 series of keepsakes. This June pamphlet, now being completed, will contain a selection of characteristic excerpts from "Prattle," Ambrose Bierce's celebrated column of comment and criticism that exerted remarkable influence throughout California during the final quarter of the last century.

One of the most formidable satirists ever developed in the West, Bierce devoted his column to the exposure and denunciation of sham and pretension wherever he encountered them. Critics are now agreed that much of his most characteristic work is to be found in "Prattle." The Club's pamphlet is made up of excerpts, com-

piled by Carroll D. Hall, from the four San Francisco journals in which the column appeared. Joseph Henry Jackson, literary editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle* and author of the recently published "Mexican Interlude," contributes a foreword to the pamphlet, which is being designed and printed by The Windsor Press.

Number Four of the series will present Emma Frances Dawson's "An Itinerant House," a short story which, when it first appeared in *The Argonaut* in 1879, was widely heralded for its originality of theme and treatment. The story was republished in book form in the '90s, but the volume in which it appeared has long been out of print, and this unusual San Francisco tale is now difficult to locate. The pamphlet will be designed and printed by The Ward Ritchie Press and will be distributed to Club members in August. Preparations for the final two pamphlets, to appear in October and December, are under way and further details will be announced presently.

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### LITERARY WEEKLIES OF EARLY CALIFORNIA

by FRANKLIN WALKER

*Editor's Note:* The March issue of this quarterly contained an article in which the anonymous author sketched the influence of San Francisco's early literary weeklies upon the development of the first distinctly Californian literature: the school of Harte, Twain, Miller, Mulford, Stoddard, and others. The present article tells something of these early papers themselves; their histories; founders, and more important contributors. Mr. Walker is a member of the English Department of San Diego State College; he has written frequently and with authority on various phases of California's literary history.

IN 1854, *Putnam's Magazine* stated: "San Francisco is only five years old, yet it supports two or three theatres,



an opera, a monthly magazine, an Academy of Science, thirteen daily papers, and we don't know how many weekly papers." The town's weeklies were not only numerous; they served a wide variety of purposes. Some were no more than weekly newspapers, some were printed in foreign languages—French, Spanish and German—and others were religious or satiric sheets. While many of these are interesting from other standpoints, the majority had no literary pretensions and do not therefore come within the scope of this article.

Of the early literary papers, H. H. Bancroft states that the best was the *Bon-ton Critic*, which began publication in March 1854. It is doubtful if any of its numbers have survived. The first literary paper to continue over a number of years was *The Pacific*, started in 1851. This called itself "A Religious and Family Newspaper," but the accent seems to have been decidedly on the former. However, in addition to articles on such subjects as "The Power of Prayer" and "The Swearer Rebuked by the Child," original poems occasionally appeared in the traditional Poet's Corner and signed papers on the Indians, mining, and scenery were used. A cursory survey through broken files covering nine years revealed no fiction.

*The Golden Era*, in many ways the most important journal ever published on the Pacific Slope, flourished from the day it was started, December 19, 1852. Within a month its city circulation was 2,000, and shortly after, announcing 1100 subscribers in the northern mines, its editors stated: "Our circulation finds its way into every city, town and mining district in the state. The miner after his hard week's toil, seated in his rude hut in the placers, finds the *Era* a welcome visitor, full

of intelligence, fun, news, and incidents." Its crowning glory was a highly decorative masthead with the title printed from letters carved out of quartz—they weighed over eight pounds and carried 17 dwt. of gold to the pound.

The success of the paper was due principally to the enthusiasm and foresight of its two young editors, J. MacDonough Foard and Rollin M. Daggett. Foard ran the paper while Daggett, in red shirt and top-boots, tramped through the mines selling subscriptions and writing the mining letters. Daggett later joined the staff of the *Virginia City Enterprise*, became a close friend of Mark Twain, published a curious California novel titled "Braxton's Bar," and rounded out his career as a minister in Hawaii.

In its early days, the *Era* was a chatty, informal journal made up of poetry and fiction, summaries of the news, an occasional signed article, and short comment by the first of its many pseudonymous writers: Vide Poche, Dow, Jr., and Cadiz-Orion. Its four pages were about equally divided among fiction and poetry, editorial and news digest, and advertisements. As the years went on, names now familiar began to appear: learned treatises by J. S. Hittell, sketches by Old Block and Caxton, and poems by Yellow Bird (J. R. Ridge). Gradually more space was given to poems and stories by Californians and, although the paper rarely paid more than \$5 a column, local writers looked on it as their most desirable market. In the correspondents' column, the editors chatted weekly with aspiring writers all over the West.

The *Era's* golden age came in the '60s, when Colonel Joe Lawrence became editor and expanded it to an



eight-page paper. It then drew young Bret (Harte) as compositor and held him as author of "M'Liss;" it used Inigo (C. H. Webb) as a columnist before he started *The Californian*; it published almost all the early poems of Pip Pepperpod (Stoddard); and brought Dogberry (Mulford) down from the mines and established his reputation as humorist and philosopher; it reprinted many articles by Mark Twain from Virginia City papers and published his comments when he was in San Francisco in '63. The *Era* ran a regular Washoe department by Dan de Quille (William Wright); it published the vagaries of the bohemian Allaquiz (Ralph Keeler); it presented prose and poetry by Professor Bones (C. H. Miller) long before he took the name of Joaquin.

Famous visitors to the Coast often made the *Era's* office their social club and wrote for its pages. Bierstadt designed a new masthead, Fitz-Hugh Ludlow, the Hasheesh Eater, wrote a series of articles, Adah Isaacs Menken contributed many poems, Artemus Ward ran humorous sketches, as did Orpheus C. Kerr; Ned Buntline wrote thrillers for it, and Ada Clare, Queen of Bohemia, became its columnist. The list is endless; every western writer to attain prominence in the '60s started with the weekly.

Although the *Era* proved the hardiest of the group, it had several early-day rivals. Most important of these was *The Wide-West*, started in 1854 by the bookdealers, Bonstell and Williston. It imitated the *Era* in format, with four large pages and mining and agricultural departments; like the *Era*, it published a Saturday edition for the mines and one on Sunday for city circulation. Devoted to "Literature, the Fine Arts, and the Diffu-

sion of General Intelligence," *The Wide-West* announced a policy of avoiding the "puffing system"—it would print no unwarranted eulogies of men or institutions. Most of its fiction was translated or clipped, and its departments were composed almost entirely of encyclopedic information, very little of which dealt with the local scene. The most valuable feature of the paper by far was its excellent engravings, many taken from drawings by Charles Nahl. Its files are a storehouse of pictures of the mines, of California pastoral life, and of early San Francisco.

In 1864, feeling that the city needed a more sophisticated journal than the *Era*—which had always catered to the "honest miner"—C. H. Webb and Bret Harte inaugurated *The Californian*. This was a much more pretentious paper than the *Era*; it had sixteen pages, was printed on better paper from larger type, and maintained a more consistently literary tone. Mark Twain, then in the city as a reporter for the *Call*, joined the venture as a regular contributor, and Ina Coolbrith, Emilie Lawson and Prentice Mulford wrote for it with some regularity. In a way, *The Californian's* urban tone was its chief defect, for it professed disdain for the richest of California subjects—the life of the pioneer with his horse-laughs and his nostalgia. Harte's best work for it was his "Condensed Novels," and the paper had the distinction of being the first Pacific Coast journal to reprint Twain's "Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." The paper proved an unprofitable venture for Webb, who presently departed for New York; Harte looked elsewhere for a market and, after a last flare-up with Mulford's "Barney McBriar: the Shootist," *The Californian* expired in 1867. The *Era* then was still



widely read, but its influence waned in the '70s. This most important of the literary weeklies was finally suffocated in San Diego, to which place it was transferred to encourage a real estate boom in 1888.

Lack of space forbids more than passing mention of other weeklies of the '60s. *The News-Letter*, founded in the late '50s and edited, from '68 to '72, by Ambrose Bierce, was one of the best. One regrets that copies of the several scandal sheets are so extremely rare—particularly after noting that, in 1866, the editor of *Mazzeppa* was horsewhipped by a woman for his evil tongue. *Puck*, *The Pacific Pictorial*, founded in 1865, aimed at humor but its pages now lack barb and spice. The sugary poetry of Kendall and Stoddard hardly bring it to life, but the cartoons (mostly by Nahl) are beyond price. *Puck*, intended to be a weekly, never managed to come out oftener than once a month.

The story of *The Argonaut*, started by Frank Pixley in 1877, is another chapter. It stands as a link between the two most productive periods of San Francisco literature, the '60s and the '90s.



## A RESOLUTION TO JOHN HENRY NASH

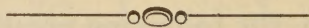
AT a regular meeting of the Club's Board of Directors, held May 13, 1936, the following preambles and resolution were unanimously adopted:

Whereas it has come to the attention of the Board of Directors of The Book Club of California that John Henry Nash, of San Francisco, California, printer of note and distinction, is about to retire from the active work of printing; and

Whereas Mr. Nash was one of the founders of the

Club, and has distinctly contributed to the advancement of its objects and purposes by his active participation in its affairs from the time of its organization to date, as evidenced by his beautiful printing of more than one-third of the total number of the Club's publications, including such worthy items as the Club's first publication, the "Bibliography of the History of California," in 1914, "The Kasidah," in 1919, "The Letters of Ambrose Bierce," in 1922, "The Nuremberg Chronicle" and "Mr. Strahan's Dinner Party" in 1930, and his last book, "California Sketches," in 1935, and also by his generosity to the members of the Club, as evidenced for example by his distribution, with his compliments, to them of the beautiful reproduction of Bret Harte's "Dickens in Camp," and which has since become a prized item for collectors, and further by his services as a director of the Club from 1921 to 1926:

Resolved: That this Board of Directors deems it fitting that it should wish, and it does hereby wish, John Henry Nash a long and happy life, with the full enjoyment of the leisure and comfort which he has well earned, and the Board expresses the hope that Mr. Nash, during his retirement, will continue to give to the printing profession the benefit of his skill, learning and experience.



#### ELECTED TO MEMBERSHIP

THE following names have been added to the roll since March 1:

<i>Member</i>		<i>Sponsor</i>
Gregg Anderson	Pasadena, Cal.	Oscar Lewis
Leet W. Bissell	Pasadena, Cal.	Oscar Lewis
Brooklyn Public Library	Brooklyn, N. Y.	Albert M. Bender
Harmer E. Davis	Berkeley, Cal.	George Fields



Mrs. D. R. Isenberg	Lihue, Kauai, Hawaii	Mrs. H. P. Faye
Los Angeles Public Library	Los Angeles, Cal.	Oscar Lewis
Dr. G. Burch Mehlin	San Diego, Cal.	George Fields
Mrs. Marcella S. Moore	San Jose, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Mrs. George B. Robbins	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Harold N. Seeger	San Francisco, Cal.	Oscar Lewis
Miss Gertrude S. Stubblefield	Berkeley, Cal.	Wilder Bentley
Reginald L. Vaughan	San Francisco, Cal.	H. D. Pillsbury
Irvin J. Wiel	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender

Thanks to the continued help of the members, the roll draws closer to its maximum of 500. The number of vacancies remaining to be filled is slightly above fifty. How to add that number of new names to the roll is the Club's most urgent problem, and it suggests that members keep this need in mind and that they recommend membership to those of their friends whom they think would enjoy sharing the Club's activities. Monotonously perhaps but in all sincerity, the Club once more repeats this message to each member: The most desirable service you can render the Club is to propose a new member.

MISCELLANY

¶ Members will shortly receive an announcement of "The Helmet of Mambrino," which is scheduled to be the Club's next publication. Written in Clarence King's most delightful vein, this story of the search for the barber's basin celebrated in "Don Quixote" was described in some detail in the March News-Letter. Unforeseen circumstances have delayed the appearance of the book beyond the time originally planned, but definite announcement of the publication date, and of the printer and price, may be expected soon. The members who sent in advance orders for the book are assured that these have been duly received and entered.

¶ Advance orders for slipcases for The California Literary Pamphlets series having all been filled, the Club reminds those who have not yet applied that future orders will be promptly filled. The cases sell for \$2.00 with all-cloth covering, and \$3.00 for cloth with morocco back.

¶ "Poems," by Nora May French, the second of the Literary Pamphlets series, appeared in April with a decorated paper cover of attractive and unusual design. A number of members having expressed curiosity as to how the design was made, the printer, Wilder Bentley, has supplied the following explanation. The process, states Mr. Bentley, is known as the "monotype technique." Briefly, it consists in applying a film of vegetable dye and vegetable sizing to a glass plate, on which the design is then made by the studied manipulation of a home-made rubber comb. A sheet of paper is next laid over the plate, even pressure is applied, and the design is transferred to the paper. This is the process in its bare outlines, with no reference to the problems involved in its practical application. The technique is said to have been originated by Whistler and to have been first adapted for use in book decoration in America by Bruce Rogers and Frederic Warde. Members who have examined the covers of the French pamphlet will agree that its effect is extremely pleasing.

¶ Members who wish their files of the News-Letter bound are requested to send the four numbers of Volume III (or of earlier volumes) to the Club for delivery to the binder. Bindings uniform with those furnished for Volumes I and II (blue cloth with the title in gold on the back) will be supplied to all members who send in their copies, and for the moderate charge of \$1.00 per volume.

¶ The geographical distribution of the Club's membership offers some interesting grounds for reflection and prompts a few questions. Who, for instance, can explain why the Club has more than a dozen members in Philadelphia and Boston and none in Cleveland or Detroit? Why are there five members in New Jersey and only one in Ohio; six in Maryland and none whatever in Virginia, Tennessee or for that matter in any of the Southern States with the sole and shining exception of Texas? Coming closer to home, is there a logical reason why Sacramento should boast three times as many members as San Jose, or the village of Los Gatos more than Santa Barbara, Stockton and Fresno combined? The Club draws no inferences from all this. But if Chambers of Commerce or other civic bodies in towns not adequately represented wish to remedy the deficiency we shall be only too glad to cooperate.